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RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 MANAMA 000446

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FOR SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY CHERTOFF

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REGION

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY
CHERTOFF'S MAY 28 VISIT TO BAHRAIN

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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¶1. (C) Mr. Secretary, we warmly welcome your May 28 visit to Bahrain. Your visit will offer an excellent opportunity to follow up on the March visit to Washington of Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, demonstrate our interest in and commitment to strengthening our cooperation on counter-terrorism, and reinforce our message on the importance of remaining vigilant on the issue of terrorism. Shaikh Rashid views the Memorandum of Understanding on Homeland Security Cooperation, which he will sign with you during your visit, as an important symbol of our cooperation and as a potential vehicle for increased linkages and assistance with the Department of Homeland Security and its various agencies, including the Coast Guard.

Shaikh Rashid will be your official host for the visit. We also expect that you will call on King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa.

Suggested Points To Raise

¶2. (C) We suggest you raise the following points:

-- Recognize the long history of cooperation and friendship between our two countries, traditionally based on the U.S. Navy presence in Bahrain but bolstered more recently by the signing of a bilateral free trade agreement.

-- Thank Shaikh Rashid for his personal commitment to protect Americans and American facilities, including the Navy base and the Embassy, in Bahrain.

-- Praise Bahrain's support for U.S. policy in the region, most notably on Iraq and Iran, and for its active support of OEF and OIF.

-- Express appreciation for the positive steps that Bahrain has taken on counter-terrorism, and stress the need to remain vigilant.

-- Hail the signing of the MOU on Homeland Security Cooperation as an important symbolic and practical measure to enhance our cooperation on CT issues.

-- Welcome suggestions for further cooperation in the areas of security and counter-terrorism.

Shaikh Rashid: Looking to Increase Cooperation

¶ 13. (C) Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid is a career military officer (former Chief of Staff) who, since assuming his position as Minister in 2004, has solidified his position as the key player on security and counter-terrorism. The Bahrain National Security Agency, which had been independent, now reports directly to him. Shaikh Rashid from his military days enjoyed close cooperation with our military, both with the U.S. Navy in Bahrain and through FMS/FMF purchases. As Minister of Interior, he continues to welcome cooperation with and assistance from the United States. Although he has actively benefited from counter-terrorism assistance available through various ATA training programs, he has been frustrated that he has not had access to funding of equipment that he enjoyed through FMS/FMF. He will welcome any assistance for the Bahrain Coast Guard, which comes under his ministry.

Military Relations: Core of the Relationship

¶ 14. (SBU) The U.S. Navy has worked closely with Bahrain for more than 50 years. When the U.S. Fifth Fleet was re-commissioned in 1995, Bahrain took the then-controversial step of being the first Gulf state to provide host government support for regionally "home-ported" U.S. Navy forces. Bahrain remains the only country in the region that hosts a permanent component command headquarters.

¶ 15. (C) Bahrain's relatively stable and secure political environment allows deployed U.S. Navy ships to stop, replenish supplies, and provide crews much needed onshore

MANAMA 00000446 002 OF 004

rest and recreation opportunities. Bahrain is currently one of the U.S. Navy's busiest overseas ports. In direct support of OEF and OIF, Bahrain in 2003 deployed 1,500 troops, a tank battalion task force, and a frigate to defend Kuwait and flew combat air patrols over Kuwait and Bahrain. A special operations unit embedded in a UAE contingent deployed to Afghanistan in 2005. Bahrain assigned three shore-based naval officers to work in the command post for coalition maritime task force CTF-150, which covers the Strait of Hormuz to the Sea of Aden. For CTF-152, which covers central Gulf waters, Bahrain has provided one frigate and two corvettes. Bahrain was the first GCC country to participate in the CTFs.

¶ 16. (C) With a small economy and limited petroleum resources, Bahrain faces greater budget constraints than its large Gulf neighbors and does not have the financial ability to fund military equipment sustainment and upgrades needed to maintain interoperability with the U.S. and to purchase equipment to defend the country. We have had active FMF and IMET programs in Bahrain for several years but the FMF program in particular has declined precipitously in recent years, from \$90 million in 2003 to a budgeted \$15 million for FY 2007, to a projected \$4 million for FY 2008. We are working closely with the Bahrainis on the CENTCOM Bilateral Air Defense Initiative and an upgrade for their early warning and air defense radar systems, a program that has been promoted in the Gulf Security Dialogue. A proposal to provide two MK-V Fast Patrol Boats to the Bahraini Navy through counter-terrorism (1206) funding has been approved by the Secretaries of State and Defense. Separately, six Boston Whalers that were originally programmed for Thailand will be diverted to Bahrain. This transfer has been approved by the Departments of State and Defense and is pending congressional approval.

Coast Guards in Bahrain

¶ 7. (U) The U.S. Coast Guard has six patrol boats (with crews of 22) that operate out of Bahrain, and 90 support and command staff assigned to USCG Bahrain. The Coast Guard Commodore commands CTF-55.6, which trains, equips, deploys, and supports maritime forces conducting operations in support of OIF and OEF in the NAVCENT area of responsibility. He has under his command, in addition to the six Coast Guard patrol boats, five U.S. Navy patrol boats.

¶ 8. (U) The Bahrain Coast Guard (BCG) was established in 1974 and has approximately 750 personnel. The BCG fleet consists of approximately 50 vessels. All are less than 20 meters in length, with the exception of one 30-meter patrol craft. Shaikh Rashid has expressed interest in obtaining additional boats for the Coast Guard, and wishes to upgrade the existing Bahrain coastal surveillance system.

Counter-terrorism/Security

¶ 9. (S) Since a low point in Summer 2004, when the Navy ordered its dependents to depart Bahrain following the arrest and then prompt release of six terror suspects, bilateral security and intelligence cooperation has improved greatly, particularly in the operational area. For example, the government shared detailed information with us regarding surveillance of the Navy base and took effective measures to disrupt any potential threat. The GOB provides perimeter security for the Navy base and the adjacent DOD school, and works and trains closely with the Embassy and Navy on security, contingency planning, and consequence management. Recently, Shaikh Rashid suggested that the MOI, Navy base, and Embassy establish a committee to study ways to enhance security around the base and develop contingencies in the event, for example, that hostilities broke out with Iran.

¶ 10. (S) A counter-terrorism bill entitled "Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts" entered into force in August 2006. The law defines the types of acts considered to be terrorism, applies tough penalties, and criminalizes conspiracy to commit terrorist acts. There is some question about whether the conspiracy clause will hold up given the constitutional court's June 2006 decision that a similar article in the penal code was unconstitutional. In September 2006, the prosecutor general released eight Bahrainis on bond following

MANAMA 00000446 003 OF 004

an investigation into possible terrorist activities. Although several members of the cell admitted to planning to travel to Afghanistan for "jihad," the prosecutor general decided he did not have enough evidence to charge them under the CT law.

¶ 11. (S) Bahrain's demographics have an impact on security issues in Bahrain. The ruling royal family is Sunni; a majority of the population is Shia. The Shia have been underrepresented in the government, especially in the security areas, and make up a disproportionate share of the country's poor, underemployed and unemployed population. Developments in Iraq and Iran have both energized Shia in Bahrain and raised apprehensions among some Sunnis. The government, ever fearful of Iranian meddling in Bahrain, is eager to focus on potential Shia/Iranian security threats. Our challenge has been to ensure that they remain equally focused on Al-Qaida-related Sunni terror threats.

Engaging Iraq

¶ 12. (S) The GOB publicly supports U.S. operations in Iraq, but as King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman have said several times, it believes Iraqi forces should be moving to the front lines in place of coalition forces. This would force Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security and put the GOI

into the position of requesting assistance from its Arab neighbors, which the Bahrainis feel it has not yet done in a meaningful way. Bahrain is mistrustful of the Iraqi government and it would like to see Maliki make greater moves to reconcile with Iraq's Sunnis. Bahrain participated in the recent Iraq Neighbors and International Compact with Iraq meetings in Egypt. The GOB's greatest concerns related to Iraq are what they view as excessive Iranian influence over the government of Iraq, and sectarian violence that could spill over into Bahrain, with its Shia-majority population ruled by a Sunni-controlled government. To help prevent problems from Iraq spilling into Bahrain (especially from Shia), the government has put a virtual ban on Iraqis traveling to Bahrain.

Dealing With Iran

¶13. (C) The Bahraini leadership is greatly concerned about the threat posed by Iran and increased tensions between Iran and the international community. Crown Prince Salman has suggested several times that the U.S. and GCC countries hold a significant military exercise in the Gulf, which would send a strong signal to Iran. Bahrain hosted and participated in Proliferation Security Initiative exercise Leading Edge last October, and the boarding/interrogation portion took place just outside its territorial waters. NAVCENT personnel were impressed with the Bahraini Navy's professionalism and aggressiveness during the exercise.

¶14. (C) The Bahraini leadership is united in its suspicion of Iranian intentions regarding Bahrain and often sees an Iranian hand in incidents involving Bahrain's Shia community. It is convinced that Iran seeks to develop nuclear weapons and assert its influence around the region. Bahrain supports and implements UN Security Council resolutions applying sanctions on Iran. At the same time, Bahrain faces the reality that it must live with its large neighbor across the Gulf. Bahrain maintains "correct" but not warm diplomatic relations with Iran, with Bahraini leaders meeting with Iranian officials when they visit and occasional Bahraini visits to Tehran. Bahraini officials repeatedly assert their strong view that the international community should engage in diplomacy to deal with Iran, and not resort to a military solution. They recognize, however, that a robust military posture can facilitate diplomacy.

Parliament

¶15. (C) Bahrain in November/December 2006 conducted its second set of parliamentary and municipal elections since the adoption of the 2002 constitution. Some 70 percent of registered voters and all political societies participated in the elections, with oppositionists winning 18 of 40 seats in the elected lower house Council of Representatives. Major

MANAMA 00000446 004 OF 004

Shia political society Al-Wifaq boycotted the 2002 election, but participated in 2006, gaining 17 of the 18 opposition seats. Sunni Islamists took 15 seats, so membership is marked by a stark Sunni-Shia divide. One woman, Lateefa Al Qaoud, ran unopposed and is Bahrain's first female elected member of parliament. The legislative session is expected to recess in late May. The five-month session was characterized by the various blocs and members getting to know each other and building confidence in their ability to work together. Oppositionists mostly steered clear of hot-button issues such as amending the constitution and redrawing electoral constituencies. However, in early May, Al Wifaq requested that a minister and senior member of the ruling family face questioning about alleged illegal financial transactions. Al Wifaq ultimately agreed to withdraw the request for now but could revive it after the summer recess.

Middle East Homeland and Global Security Forum

¶16. (U) Shaikh Rashid last month presided with great public fanfare over an event announcing that Bahrain would host a regional forum on homeland and global security November 19-22. He subsequently wrote to invite you speak at the forum. The Forum will be organized by CransMontanaForum, and the initial program includes such broad topics as the global approach to today's terrorism, prevention and assessment, specific concerns in the Middle East, and cooperation between the public and private sectors. The organizers anticipate inviting Ministers, Central Bank Governors, heads of police, customs and intelligence organizations, and academics from the Middle East and other major countries. Shaikh Rashid will most likely reiterate his invitation to attend this event during your May 28 visit here.

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